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SOVIET ROLE IN THE GULF CRISIS, 21 May 84

Although the USSR has a keen interest in the Gulf crisis and claims a geopolitical role in the area, its actual influence over current developments is minimal. This is because, short of massive military pressure on Iran:

+ It cannot offer credible protection against Iranian attacks.

+ Its military assistance to Iraq is insufficient to allow Iraq to win or end the conflict with Iran.

In the near term, the Soviets can be expected to:

+ Propagandize against the prospect of US intervention.

+ Solidify ties to Iraq as much as possible.

+ Exploit Gulf state nervousness to make diplomatic inroads.

There is a chance that the Soviets will take military measures within the USSR, such as force exercises and alerts, to impress upon the region the seriousness of Soviet interests. Since it is highly unlikely that such gestures will intimidate Iran, they will have largely atmospheric influence. In the main, the Soviets will count on regional nervousness, any doubts about US credibility, and internal disorders to give them later opportunities for expanding their influence.

Any invitations from the US or the Gulf states to join multilateral discussions to ease the crisis would offer the Soviets welcome opportunities to gain a role they do not enjoy on their own. At the same time, they will be reluctant to respond to such invitations in any way that makes it look like they are doing constructive business with the US and somehow giving license to US actions.

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